Catalogue no. 16-508-X
ISBN 978-0-660-08280-6

Environment Fact Sheets

Treatment of drinking water by Canadian households, 2015

by Environment, Energy and Transportation Statistics Division

Release date: May 1, 2017

Statistics Canada Statistique Canada

Canada

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. not available for any reference period
.. not available for a specific reference period
... not applicable
0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
0^s value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
^{p} preliminary
^{r} revised
x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
^{E} use with caution
F too unreliable to be published
* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Published by authority of the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada

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Treatment of drinking water by Canadian households, 2015

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Many Canadian households treat their drinking water. In 2015, close to 51% of households used at least one method to treat drinking water, regardless of whether their water came from a municipal water supply or not. A slight decrease was noted in comparison with 2013, when 53% of households treated their water.

Households in Newfoundland and Labrador (65%) were most likely to treat their drinking water before using it, while Quebec households (39%) were least likely to do so.

Among census metropolitan areas (CMAs), households in Winnipeg (73%), Barrie (68%) and Calgary (65%) were most likely to treat their water. Conversely, this was less common in the Windsor (42%), Québec (35%) and Sherbrooke (25%) CMAs (Chart 1).

Treatment methods and reasons

Households treated their drinking water for a variety of reasons, including 45% who did so for aesthetic reasons (taste, appearance or odour) and 37% to remove chemicals (such as chlorine). As well, households treated their water to eliminate potential bacteria (30%), soften hard water (19%) and remove metals (26%).

Of the different methods used to treat water, jug filters were the most commonly used (25% of Canadian households that treated their water), followed by on-tap filters (18%), boiling water to make it safe to drink (12%) and water filters installed directly on the main supply pipe (9%).

Household characteristics

Specific characteristics can influence the likelihood that a household will treat its drinking water. Having a private water source rather than a municipal system as a water source is a major factor influencing the method of water treatment. For example, 6% of households connected to a municipal system had a filter on the main supply pipe, while

Source: Dreamtimes

37% of households with other sources of water had such a system. This difference could be attributed to uncertainty associated with the quality of water coming from a private source that hasn't already been treated such as water from a municipal system.

Households that owned their dwellings were more likely (55%) to treat their water than those that did not (38%). Homeowners used tap filters more frequently than non-owners (22% versus 7%) and were more likely to use filters on the main supply pipe (11% of owners versus 3% of non-owners).

Households with children were also more likely to treat their water. For instance, 48% of adult-only households treated their water, compared with 56% of households with children. The use of on-tap filters was more common in households with children, 24% used this type of filter, compared with 16% of adult-only households.

Households with higher total annual incomes had a tendency to treat their water differently than those with

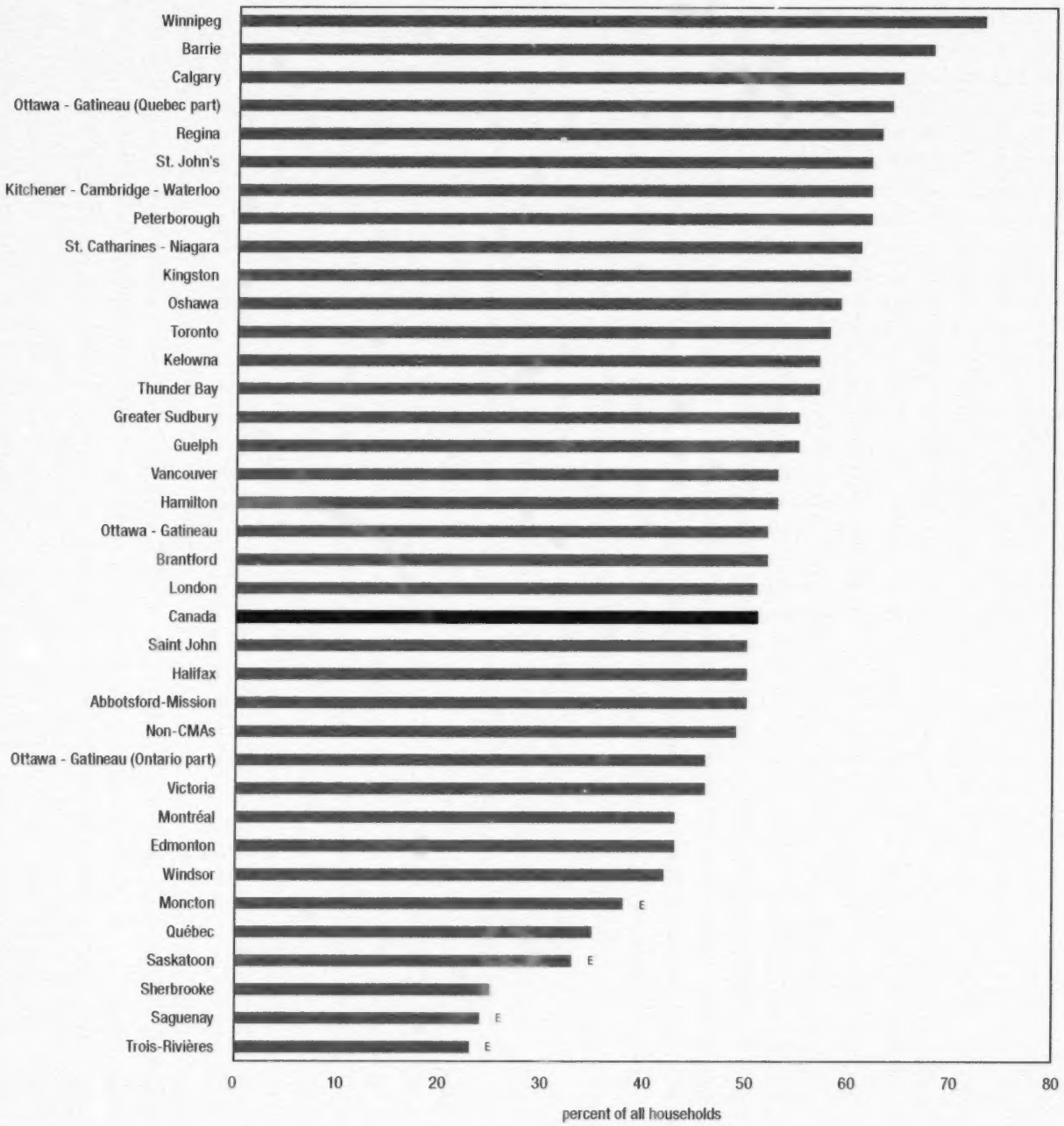
lower incomes. For example, 43% of households with an income of less than $60,000 per year treated their water, compared to 50% of households earning between $60,000 and $100,000 and 58% of those earning more than $100,000 per year. The difference was most obvious with the use of on-tap filters. Ten percent of the lowest-income households and 27% of the highest-income households relied on this method to treat their water.

The age of a dwelling is another factor that influenced the likelihood of drinking water being treated. Practices tended to differ mostly between households with homes built before 1995 and those with newer dwellings. While 47% of households with older homes used some kind of water treatment method, 62% of those with newer dwellings did the same. The difference lies mainly in the use of on-tap filters in newer houses (29%) compared to dwellings built before 1995 (15%).

Boil water advisories

Having been under a boil water advisory within the previous 12 months had a substantial bearing on the likelihood of a household treating its water, particularly by boiling it. In total, approximately 10% of Canadian households indicated that they had been issued a boil water advisory in 2015. Of these households, 60% boiled their water. Other practices were also used during boil water advisories. For example, 65% of households drank bottled water and 12% filtered their water.

Chart 1
Households that treated their water before drinking it, 2015



E use with caution
Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 153-0123.

About the Households and the Environment Survey

The Households and the Environment Survey asks Canadian households about their activities and behaviours with respect to the environment. It covers a wide variety of topics including water and energy consumption and conservation, hazardous products used in the home, and the household's interactions with nature. Data from the survey are used by government to guide policies and programs, by researchers to learn more about Canadians and by individuals to see how they compare to the rest of the country. The target population of the 2015 Households and the Environment Survey consisted of households in Canada, excluding households located in Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut, households located on reserves and in other Aboriginal settlements in the provinces; and households consisting entirely of full-time members of the Canadian Armed Forces. Institutions and households in certain remote regions were also excluded.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 3881

Available in CANSIM: table 153-0123

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